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Chair

The Honourable MaryAnn Mihychuk

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.)): Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), we are here to discuss the main estimates 2018-19: vote 1 under the Canadian High Arctic Research Station; votes 1, 5, 10, L15, and L20 under the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development; and votes 1, 5, and 10 under the Department of Indigenous Services Canada; as referred to the committee on Monday, April 16, 2018.

We are on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people, an important measure to recognize as we move through the process of reconciliation.

Madam Minister, I'm very pleased to have you join us today. There is some uncertainty of our time. We wish to convene quickly, so I'll turn it over.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs): Thank you again. It's great to be back. I also thank you, Chair, for recognizing the unceded Algonquin territory on which we meet today.

I think you know associate deputy minister Diane Lafleur and chief finances, results, and delivery officer Paul Thoppil. We all had our titles changed, so this is good.

As we discussed before, my appearance is in the context of the evolving estimates process. While this important work falls under the purview of the President of the Treasury Board, I can assure you that our work on estimates reform is guided by our belief that parliamentarians and Canadians have the right to know where public funds are going and how they will be spent.

[*Translation*]

I appeared before you on March 20 regarding this year's interim estimates.

[*English*]

Now I'm pleased to appear on the department's main estimates for this year, which total $3.1 billion. The 2018-19 main estimates reflect a misleading appearance of a decrease of $6.9 billion, in comparison with the main estimates of 2017-18, of $10.1 billion.

[*Translation*]

However, this is in fact due to the transfer of funding to newly created Department of Indigenous Services Canada.

[*English*]

This decrease should not be considered as a cut to my department; rather, it's a significant and positive step towards reconciliation through the dissolution of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. In fact, our government's third budget invests an additional $5 billion over five years to close significant socio-economic gaps of indigenous peoples, moves towards recognition and implementation of indigenous rights, and helps build capacity and accelerate indigenous self-determination. These investments build upon the historic investments of $8.4 billion in budget 2016 and $3.4 billion in budget 2017, for a total commitment to date of almost $17 billion of additional federal funding for the priorities of indigenous peoples.

The budget 2018 investments flowing through my department will help nations rebuild and accelerate self-determination and self-government. These include the $51.4 million for the ongoing recognition of rights and self-determination discussions, $101.5 million to support nation rebuilding efforts, and $74.9 million over five years to provide permanent funding to support the permanent bilateral mechanisms with first nations, Inuit, and the Métis nation.

Budget 2018's $51.4 million for the recognition of rights and self-determination discussions is in addition to the already approved funding to support this new approach. Since 2015, I'm excited to report, 65 discussions on the recognition of indigenous rights and self-determination have been launched with over 335 either Indian Act bands or Métis governments, with a total impact, to the indigenous population, of over 753,000 people. To date, 19 negotiated agreements have been co-developed and signed through these discussions, and others will follow in the following months.

● (1535)

[*Translation*]

Given the overwhelming increased interest of indigenous communities in this new approach, budget 2018's additional funds will facilitate their expansion.

[*English*]

The $101.5 million provided in this year's budget for nation rebuilding efforts will support indigenous-led activities with the objective of indigenous communities coming together as they see fit to reform their nations. The definition of nation will be left to indigenous communities to determine, but may be based on culture, language, or territory.

The new, permanent bilateral processes are already happening. They provide an opportunity for first nations, Inuit, and Métis to express their distinct priorities and a mechanism for us to work together to develop solutions.

Our government has been clear that the relationship between Canada and indigenous people must be based on the recognition and implementation of indigenous rights.

[*Translation*]

In February, the Prime Minister asked me to lead Canada's national engagement to co-develop a new recognition and implementation of rights framework, which will result in the introduction of corresponding legislation.

[*English*]

To date, we've held over 80 engagement sessions and have met with more than 1,000 people across the country. We are being guided by what indigenous communities, women, youth, elders, and traditional leadership envision as being included in such a framework. The good news is that nation rebuilding is happening. I see this reflected in the renewed excitement from indigenous youth who want governance that will respect and honour their language and culture, restore indigenous control over the welfare of their children, deliver education and health systems of their own design, and recognize traditional legal practices and customs.

We are working in partnership with indigenous communities on a path to vibrant, proud nations that are in charge of their lives and their land. Achieving this is not only in the interest of indigenous people but of all Canadians.

I look forward to discussing these and other issues in more detail through your questions.

Thank you. *Meegwetch*.

Also, Madam Chair, with regard to the rights recognition process, whether you think that we should either have a breakfast again or come back, I think that before the session ends, it would be good for me to just fill you in on what we've been hearing so far on that, and what people are saying to us should be in that framework that we will go out and test over the summer.

The Chair: That's very nice. We'll take you up on that.

Questioning will start with MP Danny Vandal.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, first of all, I want to thank you for appearing today. As a proud Manitoba Métis, I was happy to read about the significant investments in the Métis nation across Canada. I thank you for that. In fact, budget 2018 states, "The Government of Canada is deeply committed to renewing the relationship with the Métis nation based on recognition of rights, respect, cooperation and partnership. Reflecting commitments in the Canada-Métis Nation Accord".

Can you comment on how your department is working to renew the relationship with the Métis nation in Canada?

● (1540)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you very much.

As you pointed out, there is now $500 million over 10 years, $200 million of which was funded in budget 2017.

The work that we're doing is with each of the Métis nations in terms of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Ontario, and the Métis settlements, as well as the Métis nation of British Columbia. What we are doing is working with each of those nations and governments to develop an agreement that will articulate their priorities on the way that they want to work with us. I think it's very important.

As you well know, we're also working with the Métis National Council on the issue of the sixties scoop and those Métis citizens who were not included in the first settlement with Chief Brown Martel. There are many other things that we're doing. There is also, of course, the work that Minister Joly is doing on the Michif language towards that bill.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Several months ago, the Prime Minister announced in the chamber that we were embarking upon a rights recognition and implementation framework, and corresponding legislation. I'm wondering if you can update the committee on how that process is going.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think in some ways, Dan, that's what I was offering to do in a more fulsome way, if we wanted to come together to hear more on that.

In what the Prime Minister described, it is moving from a "denial of rights" approach to a "recognition of rights" approach. For the Inuit, where their land claims have been settled and their rights have been recognized, it's making sure that there's a framework around accountability for implementation. That will apply to first nations, Inuit, as well as the Métis nations.

By moving from a denial of rights approach to the recognition of rights, really we're doing the work that.... A lot of people say that this conversation should have happened 150 years ago in terms of how we would work together. A lot of people feel that really this conversation should have happened in 1982, when indigenous and treaty rights were affirmed and recognized in section 35. At that time, a whole bunch of work was done on sections 1 to 34 of the charter and on making sure that all the laws and policies and practices of Canada were charter-compliant, or in keeping with the charter.

The work we're doing now is actually the recognition and implementation of those indigenous and treaty rights. As we move to a legal framework that would allow communities—when, as the Minister of Justice says, they're ready, willing, and able—to opt in to a different relationship with Canada, which was not offered in the Indian Act, or was ignored in the case of the Métis or in the case of the Inuit, the accountability framework is to make sure those rights are applied. That's the work we've been out listening to. We think we have some ideas around how we would help and would get out of the way for the reconstitution of nations, which means nations who want to work together.

Now we will fund those conversations, but instead of those being based on loans, it means that as they move toward self-determination, we're helping them do that in sectoral ways, if they want—like education, like health, like child welfare. We're also moving to the kind of dispute resolution that was in, say, the Canada Health Act, where there would be a way, without having to go to court, for people to resolve disputes with Canada, with provinces and territories, amongst nations.

Those seem to be the three things we're hearing most, but I'm happy to have a longer conversation with the committee later.

● (1545)

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you.

Bill C-262, related to UNDRIP, is weaving its way through the parliamentary process. Can you perhaps offer some thoughts on how that bill will intertwine with or relate to the rights framework you just talked about?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you for the question, because I think that's the other piece we've been hearing from coast to coast to coast, that the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples needs to be a foundation of the legal framework. But it means you have to read every article. As we learned at the child welfare summit, forcibly removing children from their families and their culture is not in keeping with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. As we build the legal framework, we need to build the mechanisms that will allow us to honour all of those articles.

There are many people who say, you know, volume 2 of the royal commission wrote it all out; why don't you get on with that? There are some parts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action that need to be in this, but basically it's saying that section 35 rights need to be honoured in the way that UNDRIP explained.

The Chair: Thank you.

The questioning now moves to MP Cathy McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Unfortunately, I understand the bells will be going at four, so we will be shorted 30 minutes of time, which is truly unfortunate because I have pages and pages of different questions. I will start with one or two and then if there is time I would like my colleague to get in at least one.

I'm glad Mr. Vandal brought up the UNDRIP. Of course we're debating that tonight. We also had a very significant announcement today by your government.

As we debated this particular piece of legislation, I think we had one witness who described it best, that people have different interpretations of free, prior, and informed consent. They range from "free, prior, informed, and maybe we get to consent or maybe we don't", versus a very definitive "we need free, prior, and informed consent, and every first nations community in a complex project needs to give free, prior, and informed consent".

Clearly, with the decision that your government made today, you go with definition one. I would like to ask you if you think it's fair that you have failed to be clear in what your definition was of FPIC because the decision today clearly demonstrated what your definition of FPIC actually is.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think we've been very clear that FPIC is not a veto and a consensus does not mean unanimity, and that in so many areas—particularly in this one—33 Indian Act bands agreed to participate in the decision that twinning an existing pipeline was a better option than other options, and that their people would benefit from it in terms of jobs and other things.

Where we need to look at how you get a consensus and include the voices of indigenous people is to the north. When the land claims organizations make a decision on land use planning, everybody is at the table and they take a decision together.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Clearly there have been expectations raised in communities across this country. We know we have a number of court cases. We know we have groups like UBCIC, and others stating that they are probably going to take the full.... There could be considerable concern in terms of what happens over the next few months.

As the minister for crown relations, what are you going to do to de-escalate the tension and potential for perhaps even violence as you move this project forward?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think it's really important that people understand that the first nations do have different views on this, and people like Chief Ernie Crey have been clear about the advantage that would take place for his people. Even today there is probably going to be an offer of a first nations-led consortium on having equity and being part of, perhaps, owning the pipeline, so—

● (1550)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I appreciate that, Minister, but my question was.... Certainly in the area I represent there are chiefs in favour of it, but I think you, as Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, have a responsibility to do something. What is your plan for those who feel so strongly about this project? What is your plan to de-escalate the tension and potential for violence?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think it's very important that people listen to one another, that we actually know that this is about a balance of interests and that there are people who feel their community would be best served by participating in this pipeline. They still need fuel for their cars and their trucks. They still need heating fuel. Until we can wean ourselves off fossil fuel....

I just think we have to listen. In my riding, where we have 80 units of crude oil going straight through downtown Toronto, we actually can't have this conversation about pipelines without talking about the safety of trains and transport trailers and all those things.

I just hope that we can listen. I think for a lot of the indigenous leaders who see this, and particularly for some of the communities that have huge investments and quality-of-life issues, it is important to make sure that people are listening to one another.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: It doesn't sound like there is a specific and definitive plan.

I would like to turn my remaining two minutes over to my colleague, Kevin Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Minister, I want to compliment you on your first statement: parliamentarians have the right to know where the funds are being spent. Thank you for that.

That said, your department has been allotted $337 million for this current fiscal year 2018-19 under vote 40. Some of the budget initiatives, as you mentioned, are $189 million for a "New Fiscal Relationship: Collaboration with Self-Governing Indigenous Governments", and $71 million for a "New Fiscal Relationship: Strengthening First Nations Institutions and Community Capacity".

Can you provide further details on what these projects entail? Are they one-offs, or is this funding being broken into different projects? I did not see it in your departmental plan. I see the numbers, but I'm wondering, in this fiscal year, under vote 40, better known as the slush fund, where this money is going.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: A lot of that is in Minister Philpott's Department of Indigenous Services.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: This is yours, though. It's $337 million.

Paul, I think you would agree. You have a new title now: chief financial delivering officer. If you can, with your new title of chief financial delivering officer, tell me where this $337 million slush fund will go.

Mr. Paul Thoppil (Chief Finances, Results and Delivery Officer, Indigenous Services and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Thank you Mr. Waugh, for the question.

It's not a slush fund. It is where the government has decided to put the budget 2018 funds that it has announced through a vote inside the Treasury Board in order to provide, for the first time, main estimates that coincide with, afterwards, the tabling of the federal budget, to provide clarity to parliamentarians when they vote on the main estimates in terms of alignment.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: There's no clarity here, though, and no committee to oversee the money—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: What happens now is that in order for the parliamentarians to have greater oversight.... This is a transition period, and——

The Chair: Thank you. We need to move the questioning to MP Georgina Jolibois.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Thank you, Minister.

Today, as you know, the report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Parliament of Canada has come out. In it, he specifically talks about the first nations, Métis, and Inuit departments. The headline from one of the papers is, "Government fails to measure gaps on First Nations reserves: audit".

Now, you spoke about a number of things. You talked about rights. You talked about involvement and the framing. I'm a first nation woman from northern Saskatchewan. When I speak to my own chief, my regional chief, and the FSIN, I don't get a clear answer.

Now, I have heard other first nations talk about the AFN, the MNC—the Métis National Council—and the ITK. Because they're not elected bodies, they don't represent the people: the first nations, the Métis, and the Inuit. They are only selected by their peers, not by the residents on reserves.

How can you safely talk about consultation and how I can frame how the youth can play into how we frame our future when we talk about rights? I see that as the government failing first nations, Métis, and Inuit people across Canada. How can you justify that?

● (1555)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you for the question, because I think it's very important that I get to explain that as we've been out on the rights recognition and implementation engagement we've been very clear that this is not the issue of national indigenous organizations. We have met with rights holders, treaty groups as treaty groups, but also hereditary chiefs. We have met with women and youth.

We are trying to get back to the indigenous legal practices and customs, the role of women in communities. We are very clear that if we're going to get this rights recognition framework right, we have to listen directly to the rights holders. That's how we have organized the engagement.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Today the government made a very important decision on the Kinder Morgan pipeline. As an indigenous person who pays taxes across Canada—as a Canadian—do I have the right to ask for a dividend payment to be coming to me now that, as taxpayers, we will be owning part of the Kinder Morgan dividends?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It's an excellent question—

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: We're going to be making money.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: —but these kinds of economic opportunities, again, are about opting in. To see some of what's happening right away, of indigenous communities wanting to become part of it, to buy into it, and then have their communities have the advantages is hugely important as we've seen with many successful communities coast to coast to coast. This is an opportunity for communities to decide how they see their future and I think we are going to see much more of this type of entrepreneurship and taking advantage of opportunities as we go forward. I think everybody is understanding that good projects go forward, such as in Nunavut and some of the communities.

An example is the gold mine near Cambridge Bay. When the rights holders are equity partners in it and the jobs go to their citizens, those end up providing certainty for the project and end up being the new way forward.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: I understand the environment and I've heard consistently from the government that the environment and the economy go hand in hand.

As a member of a first nation who grew up on the trapline with families that still practise that tradition of hunting, trapping, and fishing for sustenance, when I hear about the type of language the government is using, it does not resonate with the first nations, the Métis, and the Inuit who are really struggling with making ends meet. When they're struggling with receiving their payments to pay their rent or their power bill, or other things, and when a family member is lost to suicide or a family doesn't qualify in the sixties scoop settlement because of the wording, how can the government justify spending $4.5 billion on a pipeline, my tax dollars, because I do pay tax? The first nations, the single moms, the elders, the moms and dads and youth who have to pay for their education, who have to pay for food and transportation, and the list goes on, are upset with the lack of support coming from the government.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: The 43 first nations that signed on to the creation of this pipeline did it because they felt that this was jobs for their people and economic opportunity. You are quite right. It's coast to coast to coast. When there are these gaps in socio-economic outcomes, we do need to do better.

That's why, as you know, in August, the Prime Minister decided to dissolve INAC so that Dr. Philpott could focus on closing the economic gaps and on the social determinants of health, and move on housing and water and educational outcomes, while I am able to focus on self-determination, knowing that communities do way better if they're making these decisions themselves.

That is why I think—

● (1600)

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Thank you, Minister. I have less than one minute here.

Some of these groups, again, the AFN, the MNC, and the ITK, are not responsible for the delivery of programs and services in their communities. How do you recognize their making decisions on our behalf, on behalf of first nations, Métis, and Inuit across Canada, when they're not yet responsible for the delivery of programs and services, for how the programs and services are run in their communities?

Please be clear on that.

The Chair: There is no time for an answer.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think the AFN has been very clear that they are not a rights holder.

The Chair: Questioning now moves to MP T.J. Harvey.

Mr. T.J. Harvey (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): Actually, it goes to Gary.

The Chair: It looks as though the list got changed.

MP Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Madam Minister and the team, welcome back.

I want to pick up on the conversation with respect to pipelines. Could you elaborate on what's happening with the announcement today? In fact, if I understand it, in terms of what was announced, it's an interim measure.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes. It's an interim measure to allow the certainty to get the pipeline built, such that until the time there would be other governance and ownership of the pipeline, including, as we've heard today, the interests a number of indigenous communities have expressed in making sure their economic interests, say in northern Alberta or Saskatchewan, are able to make it to tidewater. Obviously first the shareholders of Kinder Morgan have to take a vote. Then it will be interesting, as this investment is viewed to be a good investment, that eventually Canada would sell the asset to a willing buyer.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: In referring to your notes, Madam Minister, you had indicated that currently 65 recognitions of indigenous rights and self-determination discussions are in place. This appears to be quite a bit higher than what you reported last time. Can you indicate the nature of these discussions? I think there are about 15 new ones; 48 was the last number, if I'm not mistaken.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It's been very exciting, and that's why we have needed the additional resources within the budget to deal with those tables.

What's exciting is that different communities are coming together to talk about different things: the 23 Anishinabe communities that want to build their own school board, the coastal first nations that want to work on their fishery, many communities wanting to talk about asserting their jurisdiction on the child welfare system or other priorities in their communities. This is almost a sectoral approach, which replaces the comprehensive claims process, which as you know was very unsuccessful and flawed, where people spent 20 years and $30 million to not quite get over the finish line.

That's the other reason, rather than doing it as loans, that we've needed the resources to fund those discussions, such that when we do complete an agreement, they are not handed a big invoice for how much it cost to get there.

The Chair: Thank you.

The bells have begun to ring. We would require unanimous consent to continue. I'd ask the committee whether that's the desire or if we wish to adjourn.

MP McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Chair, before we discuss whether we would give unanimous consent, I would like to know that if there were any additional rounds, how much time would be given. I understand there are about four minutes. Would we be talking 10 minutes?

● (1605)

The Chair: The question was whether we would have Minister Bennett back, or—

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: No, if it would be 10 minutes into the bells that the unanimous consent would be four versus five, or....

The Chair: Do we want to go to 4:15?

Gary.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Yes, an additional 10 minutes are fine, Madam Chair. I would request that I be permitted to complete my questions, and then the remaining time to be—

The Chair: You have just less than four minutes.

All right, go ahead, please.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you.

Madam Minister, I apologize for that. I know we're short on time now.

Can we talk about UNDRIP? I know that Bill C-262 will be debated today for the third hour. One difficulty we have is that two major parties are supporting it; our government's supporting it. It would be a good sign if we had all three major parties supporting this legislation. I'm wondering what you have to say to the Conservatives on this, because I think this is the time to set the history right.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Right. I think what I have to say is what I said at the UN a year and a half ago. It's not scary. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the way forward in the original understanding of peace, harmony, and a balance of interests. How you achieve consensus is by having indigenous rights holders involved at the very idea of a project, and then have them be part of every stage of that project. As we found with Kinder Morgan, even communities who objected to the project to begin with are very interested in being part of monitoring the project and being part later on. Again, it's the kind of idea that happens in Nunavut, where good projects are accepted early on and bad projects are rejected, where mining companies come to understand the certainty that comes with doing a better job persuading those land use planning boards of the value of the balance of the economy and the environment.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Minister, you indicated that the new recognition and implementation of rights framework will be coming as corresponding legislation. Can you indicate a timeline in terms of the implementation of that legislation? I know the legislation is one aspect, but for it to be operationalized, what kind of timeline are we looking at?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: We are hoping that we will have the compilation of what we've heard so far in categories by the time we rise in June so that we can go out and test the ideas over the summer and begin co-developing the legislation. We think it's quite simple. Like the Canada Health Act, it's based on principles. It's based on what you can expect. We hope that all Canadians will be with us so that no future government can roll it back and that the provinces and territories understand their role in this. I think the Prime Minister is hopeful that the legislation will be tabled in the fall and that we will be able to have royal assent before the next election.

The Chair: Questioning now moves to MP Cathy McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you, Madam Chair.

This will go to Mr. Thoppil.

I know there is a new estimates system, but certainly the Parliamentary Budget Officer and many other experts have clearly stated that the $7-billion slush fund through vote 40 might notionally apply to what was in the budget, but there is nothing that commits to that money being spent in the way that it was notionally signified in the budget. Clearly the Parliamentary Budget Officer and many others have said it is a $7-billion slush fund with no checks and balances that normal money is subject to in terms of parliamentary oversight.

● (1610)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Cathy, let me have a go at it first. The issue is that the Treasury Board process is one where none of the funds are released until Treasury Board is comfortable that this is in keeping with what was said.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: But, Madam Minister, this is not about Treasury Board. This is about the MPs doing their job, which is holding you to account. There is going to be an ask for vote 40, and it will be $7 billion that can be spent where we do not have the ability to—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I will just finish by saying that the agreement now is that Treasury Board will post monthly every time they are releasing money, and this is for this transitional time.

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Just as an add-on, I believe the President of the Treasury Board has made a commitment to provide clarity in the supply bill to make sure there is no light between the budget items and the items that are in vote so that, when parliamentarians vote on the supply bill, you are voting on specifically those items, and those are the only things the government will be able to spend on.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I tend to have more comfort with the assessment of the PBO, but having said that, I have two more areas. I hope to get to murdered and missing women, but I have one quick question before I go there. This is related to marijuana and the excise tax.

When cabinet made the decision about the distribution of the marijuana excise tax to provinces and territories, why, as minister for crown relations, did you fail to stand up for indigenous interests and ensure they were part of this sharing agreement? We have communities that are going to be impacted by Bill C-45. Money was given to the provinces with the deal that they would share with the municipalities. It would appear, in spite of the commitment by the Prime Minister that this is the most important relationship to him, some of the communities that are going to be most impacted have been totally left out of any sharing agreements around excise tax.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think all of the implementation of the this and what will happen in communities is in active discussion as to really how this will be implemented.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: They have been excluded from the excise tax sharing, which has been given to provinces, territories, and municipalities.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: There are different approaches in terms of taxation, but the excise tax is one. I think that communities are in active negotiations.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: But they are excluded from the federally imposed excise tax.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: They can make their own decisions about growing, selling, taxing, or anything they want.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: They've been excluded from the dollars that are going to be collected across Canada for excise purposes and are being transferred to the provinces and municipalities for those communities to cope with the issues.

If a community decides on their own to sell a product and manages to have a taxation that's put into place around it, that's fine, but we have communities across this country that will be impacted and might not chose to take advantage of tax opportunities. They have been excluded from any opportunity that municipalities will be enjoying around issues such as how we even monitor something like four plants in a home.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Technically, it was the provinces and territories, and then—

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: The government chose to give—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: —municipalities are part of the provinces and territories. Again, it's a negotiation.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: A negotiation that excluded first nations and indigenous people in Canada.

In November 2017, you received the interim report from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. That was almost six months ago. Of the 10 interim recommendations, have you acted on any of them, and have you accepted any of these recommendations?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you for that.

Yes, very shortly we will be able to provide a very comprehensive response to their interim report. We believe that in terms of all of the previous reports, all of the previous recommendations, this crosses many ministers' departments, and we look forward to sharing that.

The Chair: Thank you. We have run out of time. You have had your five minutes, so that fulfills that portion.

We're going to suspend, go and take care of the vote, and then we will return.

● (1610)

(Pause)

● (1650)

The Chair: Welcome, everybody. We're back in our meeting, and we have the privilege of having the Minister of Indigenous Services.

As I said previously, we always recognize that we're on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

We're very pleased to have you, and without cutting any more time, I'll turn it over to you for what I understand is a fairly short presentation. Then we can do a round of questions.

Over to you, Minister.

● (1655)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Indigenous Services): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to meet with the committee again, this afternoon, acknowledging that we come together on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

With me today are associate deputy minister Sony Perron and chief, finances, results and delivery officer Paul Thoppil.

[*English*]

I have abbreviated my comments significantly, given the time constraints that we have, but I did want to say that I am pleased to be here with you to discuss the main estimates that were tabled on April 16. For our new Department of Indigenous Services, they represent spending of $9.3 billion, and you will note that investments made in budget 2018 are reflected in the estimates of the Treasury Board Secretariat.

Before moving to main estimates, I want to take a moment to remind colleagues about the significant investments being made under budget 2018. You will notice, for example, that we have invested $1.4 billion in new funding over the next six years for the very important issue of indigenous child welfare.

In the matter of housing, there is funding of $600 million over three years for first nations housing on reserve, $500 million over 10 years for Métis nation housing, $400 million over 10 years for the Inuit-led housing plan, as well as other important investments such as $27.5 million over five years to support the elimination of tuberculosis in Inuit Nunangat.

[*Translation*]

I am pleased that important areas like water and wastewater infrastructure, child and family services, and health care are continuing to receive much-needed investments through the main estimates.

[*English*]

It should be noted that there are always more needs than what is reflected through these estimates, and I want to affirm that our government is committed to fully addressing the unacceptable socio-economic gaps that exist between indigenous peoples and non-indigenous Canadians. After I'd made a comment like that, a first nations elder once said to me, words do not feed a table. His comment was that we need more than words; we need action, including the resources to accomplish the ambitious goals we have. I'm pleased to say that these goals are being well resourced.

Nine months ago we started a transformation process with the dissolution of the previous Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada and with the creation of two new departments. There are driving forces behind this work of transformation that you're aware of, which are, as I've said, closing the socio-economic gaps that exist, and also supporting and affirming the rights of indigenous peoples, including the right to self-determination as an essential part of the work of our government.

In the last nine months, we have focused on five particular priority areas, which are child well-being, education, health, infrastructure, and economic prosperity, and these appropriations for the main estimates that we are discussing today support these priorities. I was going to take time to highlight a bit about each of those priority areas, but I will dispense with that and simply say that I believe that the socio-economic gaps that exist in indigenous communities are shameful, but they are also solvable. As we work to support and affirm the recognition of indigenous rights and likewise invest wisely in the work of reconciliation, I believe that we will make great progress in this regard.

I am very happy to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll open the questioning with MP Will Amos.

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you, Minister Philpott, and to your hard-working civil servants. We really appreciate your coming before us.

I take your message that we need to back up statements, words, and symbols with financial means to achieve the objectives of a new relationship and a long-term effort towards reconciliation. Communities that I represent are very focused on the day-to-day, like the house they live in, the water coming out of their tap or otherwise, their source of electricity, and the schooling opportunities that they have.

While I've reviewed the main estimates, I want to focus my questions on practical issues that my constituents would want me to ask, given that I have this opportunity on the record to address you.

The Algonquins of Barriere Lake, in particular the community of Rapid Lake, have been identified as a really challenged community in the riding of Pontiac. It's the most northerly community in the riding. It's about two and a half hours north of where we sit right now. They're on diesel power. They've had many housing issues. Last year, their school was closed for many weeks as a result of mould. It's a community that's under third party management.

I know that there are ongoing negotiations around the third party management aspect. I'd love it if there could be some form of update provided on that. Subsequently, I also want to know a bit more about discussions that I believe are linked to these negotiations that are under way on third party management, particularly discussions around the issue of achieving a more secure power source through the bringing in of hydro lines. At the end of the day, their diesel power is not reliable. That's the source of the mould because the pipes break when the power goes down. From your own officials, I know that they're concerned about that power source, which holds up investments in infrastructure, like housing, schools, etc.

Could you please comment on that for the sake of my good constituents in the community of Rapid Lake?

● (1700)

Hon. Jane Philpott: Thank you very much for the question and for your concern for the people of this community, who are clearly facing some very serious challenges in terms of the day-to-day issues of their community, by what you describe.

I am happy to report that it is my understanding that, on the matter of the dependency on diesel, which is a very serious problem, there is work under way to be able to connect this community to the hydroelectric grid. I'd be happy to get my office to work with you to get you some more details in terms of the timing on that, but I understand that discussions are under way on that matter. It is a really good news story that this will be able to happen, not only to bring reliable power and address issues like mould, but also, of course, to deal with the impacts of diesel on the environment.

I think there's good news coming in that regard.

On the issue of third party management, again, this is an area where I'd be happy to have follow-up conversations with you, as to how the community can be supported in this area. I'm happy to say that this is an area in which the department has actually supported some very effective background work through the First Nations Financial Management Board in working with communities who have been in various forms of intervention, including third party management. The approach that the FNFMB has had has been to build capacity and governance, solidarity, and good management practices within communities that have faced various forms of intervention.

In fact, a very little known reality is that when we formed government, there were 12 communities across the country that were in third party management. The FNFMB has worked with those communities. Through training and capacity building, there are now only two communities in the whole country on third party management. I think that's good news for those 10 that have been lifted out of that intervention state, and they're continuing to progress.

If I'm not mistaken, I believe the community that you're referring to is one of the two that remains. It may be worthwhile to share this conversation with the leaders in that community, in terms of what we've seen to be successful in working with a first nations institution to be able to address those issues. It's my understanding that the department is helping to sort through some of those details, but I'd be happy to make sure that we have follow-up.

Mr. William Amos: Thank you very much.

I'd like to ask a further question about clean water, to understand better how your department goes about prioritizing clean water infrastructure across communities in Canada.

For example, the community of Kitigan Zibi, another first nation community in the riding of Pontiac, has received significant investments in water. Pipes were brought in for a major portion of that community, with an investment of around $5 million in 2016. There's more to do, but I recognize that there are other communities across Canada that are facing severe boil water advisories, so I just want to understand better. How does the department go about determining where the priorities ought to be?

● (1705)

Hon. Jane Philpott: Access to clean water is an issue that Canadians are quite concerned about, but it involves more than just the water systems themselves. It involves, as you say, investments in issues like waste water, which ultimately affects access to clean water as well. We now have close to $2 billion in new investments in this area. The public has been focusing on lifting these long-term drinking water advisories, which I think is a really smart place to focus. Obviously, we have a lot of very intense work happening on that, but I want to assure you that we're not forgetting to also invest in areas like water distribution systems.

In fact, I was in Six Nations a few months ago announcing investments in water distribution systems. Last week I was in Maskwacis, near Edmonton, announcing investments in a waste-water system, which is the largest single investment in any kind of infrastructure project in that community. There is a broad range—

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. Jane Philpott: —and we will talk more about that in the future.

The Chair: Okay.

The questioning now moves to MP Arnold Viersen.

I'll try to give you signals when we're getting close.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Thank you, Minister, for being here today.

It's been two and a half years since your department ceased requiring first nations to comply with the First Nations Financial Transparency Act. Up until then compliance rates were over 90%. Can you tell me how many of the 630 first nations are in compliance today?

Hon. Jane Philpott: As you may know, this was something that Minister Bennett spoke to when she had this role previously. We know that well over 90% of communities are in full compliance, but we have actually taken a different approach to this issue.

Maybe Paul can give us the exact number.

Mr. Paul Thoppil: It's 91% out of the 630, which is around the same as last year.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: It's around the same, okay.

In his mandate letter to you, the Prime Minister said, "We have also committed to set a higher bar for openness and transparency in government." I find that interesting, seeing as you're not enforcing the transparency act for our first nations brothers and sisters.

Do you believe in the rule of law, essentially?

Hon. Jane Philpott: Certainly I believe in the rule of law. I would argue that people's desire to have open and accountable and transparent governance is somewhat universal. In fact, first nation governments want just as much as our government does to make sure they are accountable to the citizens they are called to serve.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Does the charter apply on reserve?

Hon. Jane Philpott: The Charter of Rights and Freedoms applies to all Canadians.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: On reserve?

Hon. Jane Philpott: It applies to all Canadians. Can you tell me specifically what that has to do with your question?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Section 15 of the charter says, "Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination". Travis Gladue is a member of the Bigstone Cree Nation, in Treaty 8 land. He's been in contact with me for over a year, trying to get his band's financial information. Is he not entitled to the protection of section 15?

Hon. Jane Philpott: People who have governments that serve them, whether they be municipal, provincial, federal, or indigenous governments, expect those governments to be accountable and respectful of the need to show how spending is done. This is no exception. In fact, I would say that the approach we have taken in terms of a respectful relationship in building that financial transparency and accountability, using first nations financial institutions like the financial management board, has actually been far more successful than the previous approach. I described to you already the fact that the FNFMB has brought 10 communities out of third party management. We've also seen now well over 100 communities who are accredited under the FNFMB for their governance.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: That's great, Minister, but what about the individuals like Travis, who's concerned about his band resources?

Hon. Jane Philpott: I would give that person the same advice that I would give to any person, whether they are concerned about the spending of their municipal government, their provincial or federal governments: they should have expectations.

● (1710)

Mr. Arnold Viersen: My municipality's financial information is available in 30 seconds on a Google search. His band's financial information is unavailable to him.

Hon. Jane Philpott: Then he certainly should be speaking to the leaders that are governing his first nation and hold them accountable.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Do you not play a role in that in terms of financial transparency because of the act? If you don't want to do that job, should you not repeal the act?

Hon. Jane Philpott: Our government is establishing with first nations a nation-to-nation relationship based on the recognition of rights, including the right to self-determination.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: So it's not your role to uphold that law.

Hon. Jane Philpott: We believe that the approach of previous governments has been counterproductive, has in fact led to serious economic—

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Let's get back to my other question, Minister. Do you believe—

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): On a point of order, Chair, please allow the minister to answer the question.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mike, it is my time on the clock—

Mr. Mike Bossio: Have respect for the minister and allow the minister to answer the question. This is a point of order.

The Chair: I disagree with you, Mr. Bossio.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: This gets back to the beginning: do you believe in the rule of law? Financial transparency is the law of the land. Travis is in some ways much better off than other people in this country, such as Charmaine Stick, because he doesn't live on a reserve. Charmaine Stick lives on a reserve. Her house has been threatened to be taken away. When asked how she can be helped, she says, "Can you help me with some ammunition?" She lives in fear of her own life.

She has taken her own band to court to get this financial transparency law enforced, and the court has sided with her.

However, you were just there announcing millions of dollars in health—

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: On a point of order, Madam Chair, relevancy is important here. The minister is here—

Mr. Arnold Viersen: You were just there announcing millions of dollars to Onion Lake Cree Nation—

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Chair, I have a point of order. It's relevancy. The minister is here to speak about the main estimates.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: No, your time has been suspended and will be renewed.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: The minister is here to talk about the main estimates, Madam Chair, and I think the questions need to be directed with respect to the main estimates. You do give quite a bit of leeway, but in this particular case I think we've gone well beyond the scope of why the minister is here.

I think if there are other issues, then the minister will probably come back and speak on that. But I think it's inappropriate to continue a line of questioning that is outside of the scope of what the minister is here to do.

The Chair: I understand from the clerk that in fact the main estimates allow you to ask questions that are very broad in scope, so I find, actually, that the questioning is appropriate.

There are approximately two more minutes left. We do have our own styles of asking questions and this is eating into the time we have for other members, so I would ask that we proceed.

MP Viersen, you have two minutes left.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Getting back to this, you were recently at Onion Lake announcing millions of dollars for their health systems there. Did you meet with Charmaine Stick while you were at Onion Lake?

Hon. Jane Philpott: I did not meet with Charmaine Stick.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: What do you have to say about her? The court ruling was found in her favour. Would you congratulate her on that?

Hon. Jane Philpott: This is something you and your colleagues bring up at committee on a regular basis and—

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Yes.

Hon. Jane Philpott: —if you have serious concerns about this particular issue, I would encourage you to reach out to me or my office at any time between my committee appearances to discuss the specifics. I'd be happy to get you details as to this particular person's circumstances.

I'm going to ask for the chief financial officer of our department to give you some comments in terms of his views as to the appropriateness of our approach and its effectiveness.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I would just put on the record that Travis has reached out to your office on a number of occasions and he has relayed to me that this has been much less than fruitful.

Hon. Jane Philpott: As I say, I'd be happy to have a conversation. You're going back and forth between a couple of different people—

Mr. Arnold Viersen: The issue is the same.

Hon. Jane Philpott: —and so the question is changing. If you are truly concerned about these communities and these particular individuals.... My goal is to see first nation communities thrive and the individuals therein to find approaches that are respectful—

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Would you say that Charmaine's actions have not been helpful?

Hon. Jane Philpott: As I say, if you want to have a specific conversation about this, I think it would be wise for you to come and approach me when I am in the House—almost every sitting day—to be able to discuss this, and not simply use it as a political tool when I appear before a committee to discuss your particular approach to financial capacity building.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Minister, the point is that the financial transparency act is something that the government must enforce.

Hon. Jane Philpott: It has not been effective.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: If they do not want to enforce it, they ought to be repealing it.

Will you be repealing the financial transparency act?

The Chair: We'll have a very short response, 15 seconds.

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Thank you very much for the question.

As you may know, the government has been embarking on a new fiscal relationship—

● (1715)

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Yes or no? Will you be repealing the financial transparency act?

Mr. Paul Thoppil: —with first nations under the Indian Act.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Will you be repealing, yes or no?

Mr. Paul Thoppil: We have been increasing the financial standards of first nations across the country, and with first nations such as Onion Lake.

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Onion Lake is now going through an accreditation process with the First Nations Financial Management Board.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you.

The Chair: The questioning now moves to MP Georgina Jolibois.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Thank you very much.

Today I found the auditor's report really disturbing, as a first nation and as an MP who is responsible for two-thirds of the population who are first nations and Métis.

One of things it said was, "The Department did not have a comprehensive picture of the well-being of on-reserve First Nations people compared with other Canadians." There is a question attached to this.

Every month, individual first nations who live on the reserve—only on reserve and not off reserve—receive an allowance. You mentioned earlier about the transferring of diesel to hydroelectricity. There is a concern among these families about what they are getting per month, with an increased hydro bill. It will be an increased hydro bill, because when we get minus-40 weather across the constituency, you crank up the heat. It eats up all of the allowances that the families will get.

Will this per-month allowance increase per family to accommodate the increased power bills, the hydro bills that will happen when the transfer occurs?

Hon. Jane Philpott: Maybe I can speak in broad terms to the benefits of changing to clean hydroelectric power rather than diesel, first of all, and then I can ask—

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: I'm not asking for that. I'm asking for the financial cost.

You can explain those to me, and I can understand that, but for the Charmaines and the individual band members who rely only on whatever amount they get per month, for food, to pay their hydro bill, to pay for children's clothes to go to school, and the list goes on, that's what I'm specifically looking for.

The first nation individuals will be looking for that answer.

Hon. Jane Philpott: I believe that you're talking about income assistance.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Yes.

Hon. Jane Philpott: This is something that we are certainly looking at and have already made improvements. We are continuing to improve, but the point is that the long-term—

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Is it going to increase?

Hon. Jane Philpott: It is under review at the moment.

There have already been investments in budget 2018 for income assistance, and we will continue to improve that.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: The answer for now is really that in the next six months, they're not going to receive an increase in their income allowance per month.

Hon. Jane Philpott: If I may, I don't think those particular communities are changing to hydroelectric power immediately.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Many of those reserves already have—the ones I'm familiar with—and they are struggling with having a $1,500 power bill. Some have up to an $1,800 power bill and cannot afford it.

Again, how can we improve the well-being of our first nations—?

Hon. Jane Philpott: By providing economic opportunity, which is exactly what first nations—

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Yes, but what does that look like? Break that down.

Instead of broad words, break it down so that it's feasible and suitable for the everyday Charmaines, and all the families we deal with on the ground.

Hon. Jane Philpott: Breaking it down means finding access to employment training, skills development, and jobs, and that's exactly what's happening.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: What are you saying to the single moms with five children? How is she going to get day care? Where is she going to put her children while she goes to obtain training?

Again, the government continues to fail first nations because of the lack of commitment to measuring their well-being, a lack of commitment to improving the lives of first nation individuals across Canada.

Hon. Jane Philpott: I'll be very happy to answer that.

I must say, I think you're conflating a couple of different issues here, but as it relates to the measurement of well-being—

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: That's the reality on the ground.

Hon. Jane Philpott: I recognize the reality on the ground. We have made unprecedented investments in improving the lives of—

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: It still affects the day-to-day individuals on the ground.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Madam Chair, I have a point of order. Will the member please allow the minister to answer a question—any question?

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: MP, you've interrupted me in the past and I didn't say anything, but today I have the right, because I feel that the minister—

Mr. Mike Bossio: And the minister has the right to answer the question.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: —is not understanding the question specifically.

The Chair: The discussion should come through me. I would ask that we be civil when we're asking questions.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Absolutely.

The Chair: Your opportunity with the minister is very short. The minister is doing a fine job of responding, and I think she can hold her own. Let's all be respectful.

● (1720)

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Absolutely, but don't interject me again, please.

The Chair: We haven't cut into your time. We'll restart it.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Thank you.

The Chair: You have about three minutes left.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Thank you, Minister.

What I'm getting to is the single mom on the ground who may have a grade 4 education and five children living in home. Her house has already been transferred to hydroelectricity, and she currently has a horrendous power bill. That is the reality on the ground for residents of Saskatchewan, Ontario, and many other places, and they're the ones who are affected the most.

How will the explanations you're providing meet their needs?

Hon. Jane Philpott: You've raised a number of things: funding for income assistance, the Auditor General's report, and skills development. I'm going to first answer the one around income assistance. This is a very important program of our government, and budget 2018 speaks to it with an investment of $87 million to support some of the really effective work that has happened around case management to deal with exactly the kinds of circumstances you're talking about.

Again, I'm always happy to help look into specific individual cases you might want to bring to my attention, but we have made more investments in income assistance. We're continuing to review the program to see how it can be expanded, but it can't be expanded in isolation. It has to be done also in the context of not desiring that people will be on income assistance forever, because most people want to be able to build skills and look for the opportunity to find meaningful work in their communities.

We are absolutely making investments that will help this individual woman, and if you'd like to give me the details on her circumstances, I would be happy to look into it further.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Again, you're misunderstanding the realities on the ground.

Going back to TB, throughout my years as a municipal leader I've been involved with community groups and the health authority—first nations and the municipality—to help work specifically with existing and potential new TB patients and the kinds of programs to eliminate it.

How realistic is the government being when it says that with the amount it has provided, it will eliminate TB by a certain amount in the far north? How can you justify that?

Hon. Jane Philpott: We are firmly committed. I believe you're referring to the announcement around the elimination of tuberculosis in Inuit Nunangat by 2030. We are the first government that's ever made a commitment to anything like this. You're referring to the fact that in the budget we had $27.5 million. That's federal money on top of money that was also given in the budget of 2017 in the order of millions of dollars. That's on top of the $400 million for housing, which is part of how you're going to solve the tuberculosis crisis. That's on top of what territorial and provincial governments will contribute to supporting the elimination of tuberculosis.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Thank you.

The Chair: The questioning now goes to MP Mike Bossio.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Thank you so much, Minister, for being here today, and thank you also to Mr. Thoppil and Mr. Perron.

Minister, Mr. Amos raised some of this a little earlier around the long-term drinking water advisories, and I'd like to delve into it a little bit more. As you mentioned, it is a very important issue to all Canadians, and I hear about it from my constituents. It was great that you came to my riding and met with the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte and saw their state-of-the-art water system that has been built. I think we'd like to see this happen across all indigenous communities at some point. I'm happy to see the added investments that are being made to expand on that system in the water mains.

Can you please speak to the progress that your department is making and has made in lifting long-term drinking water advisories on reserves?

Hon. Jane Philpott: Thank you for the question.

As I indicated earlier, this is an issue that comes up all across the country when I speak to Canadians, whether they're indigenous peoples or non-indigenous Canadians. We all believe in the fact that every Canadian should be able to access clean drinking water in their community. The Prime Minister put a big emphasis on this by making sure that we have long-term funding, and making a commitment in budget 2016 to $1.8 billion. We have added to that this year because of the fact that communities like yours—the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, in your riding, was one of the communities—had water systems in their country that previous federal governments had not taken on the responsibility to support, even though they were public systems on reserve.

We expanded our commitment to the number of systems that we are supporting in the Prime Minister's commitment, so that by March of 2021 we will lift all long-term drinking water advisories for public systems on reserve. This is not a small feat, otherwise previous governments would have been able to do this. We have invested the long-term funding. We have the absolute political will on this and the meticulous organization behind it that, I think, is going to get the job done.

To date, we have lifted 62 long-term drinking water advisories. There are still 76 in place as we speak, I believe. Seventy-five or or 76; that may need to be updated. There's much more work to be done, but we are tracking each one of these advisories very diligently.

You'll note that, during this time, we're not shy about saying that 32 long-term drinking water advisories have been added. That has highlighted to us that there was a need, not only to address the communities that had the long-term drinking water advisories but those that were at risk of developing one. We have added work on these communities to our diligence, where we believe there's a risk that they will slip into a long-term drinking water advisory. This is something that we follow very closely. We work with communities to address issues like the training of water operators on reserve, and making sure that they are also well-supported to be able to do the operation and maintenance over the long term.

● (1725)

Mr. Mike Bossio: It's interesting that you raise the fact that 32 have been added in that time. Is it a case that this just came about, or is it that, in the past, the government wasn't recognizing that these needed to be added? Can you tell me a little about why that discrepancy existed? Why have some of these been added in that time?

Hon. Jane Philpott: Thanks for asking the question so I can clarify what I meant by that.

When I talked about the 32 that were added, I meant that during the time that we've been lifting long-term drinking water advisories, there are some communities that have developed a long-term drinking water advisory. Those have been added to our total number, to bring the number to the 76, I believe, that are in effect right now.

The other issue I was referring to earlier is that when we did—if you'll pardon the pun—a deep dive into this issue early on, under Minister Bennett and the really hard work of our officials, we determined that we had a list of long-term drinking water advisories. Nobody had ever before even itemized, in this sort of meticulous detail, which communities had advisories. It became apparent to us that there were a few dozen communities that had long-term drinking water advisories and they were in public places like community centres, or nursing stations. The previous federal government hadn't taken the responsibility to support those communities. We said that's just not right. We actually wanted to add to our commitment and make our work a little bit harder. That's why you'll notice that I made this announcement in January of this year when I did a major press conference. We announced that we were adding a number of other communities to our commitment, including the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Am I done?

The Chair: I'm going to ask for the committee's attention, because we do have to go through the votes.

I want to thank you. It was feisty, as predicted. I'm so glad that you were able to answer many of those questions. Obviously, we care deeply about the issue. We're very pleased that you came here to our committee.

Don.

Mr. Don Rusnak (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): I just want to compliment Kevin Waugh on his coat tonight.

Voices: Oh, oh!

● (1730)

The Chair: Here we go to the main estimates, 2018-19: vote 1 under the Canadian High Arctic Research Station; votes 1, 5, 10, L15, and L20 under the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development; and votes 1, 5, and 10 under the Department of Indigenous Services Canada.

CANADIAN HIGH ARCTIC RESEARCH STATION
Vote 1—Program expenditures.....$28,089,505

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT
Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....$613,211,553
Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....$15,091,444
Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....$2,359,854,884
Vote L15—Loans to native claimants.....$25,903,000
Vote L20—Loans to First Nations in British Columbia.....$30,400,000

(Votes 1, 5, 10, L15, and L20 agreed to on division)

INDIGENOUS SERVICES CANADA
Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....$1,514,225,594
Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....$5,411,792
Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....$7,726,188,009

(Votes 1, 5, and 10 inclusive agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report the main estimates 2018-19 to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

This meeting is adjourned.

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